

Supporting the rights of workers has been one of my commitments since I first ran for elected office. Our workers are the backbone of the economy and deserve wages and protections equal to the value they contribute. I have worked to end discrimination in the workplace and ensure the fundamental rights of workers are upheld.

In response to the rising tide of unemployment, I introduced new legislation to strengthen protections for laid-off workers. H.R. 2077, the [Alert Laid off Employees in Reasonable Time \(ALERT\) Act](#), amends the federal WARN Act, under which employers are only required to provide 60-days notice if a mass layoff impacts at least 500 employees or a third of a workforce that is greater than 49 employees at one employment site. My bill would extend the definition of "mass layoff" to include layoffs by one employer at more than one worksite, as well as increase the penalty for violating the WARN Act and doubling back pay for violated workers, among other protections. Our hardworking men and women are the backbone of our economy and we owe them laws that are as strong as their work ethic.

In December 2008, I engaged the U.S. Department of Labor and U.S. Department of Justice to investigate Republic Windows and Doors when it abruptly gave its 250 workers three days notice of termination. With the holiday season less than three weeks away, the factory appeared to have violated the WARN Act by leaving employees without compensation and without health insurance. I helped negotiate a settlement with Bank of America, Republic Windows and Doors and the United Electrical Workers to ensure that workers were paid their rightfully-owed eight-weeks salary, all accrued vacation and two months paid healthcare.

Today the working poor are one of the largest growing sectors of the economy. They fulfill many of the basic needs of our communities, but their efforts are not rewarded with wages sufficient to care for a family's basic needs. I strongly believe we should value and reward the hard work of the American people with a decent, livable minimum wage. After urging my colleagues over several years to support an increase, Congress passed legislation in 2007 to increase the minimum wage under the Fair Labor Standards Act. The increase was implemented in three steps, with the final increase occurring on July 24, 2009, bringing the minimum wage to \$7.25 per hour. The increase was long overdue, but there is more to be done. The 2009 federal poverty level for a family of four as determined by the Department of Health and Human Services is \$22,050 annually. A full time worker would have to earn \$10.60 per hour to reach that standard.

To reduce this disparity, I have introduced the [Federal Living Wage Responsibility Act](#) , H.R. 1334. This act would have required the Federal government and any employer under a Federal contract or subcontract exceeding \$10,000 to pay each of their respective workers an hourly wage (or salary equivalent) necessary for such employee to earn at least the amount of the Federal poverty level for a family of four as determined by the Department of Health and Human Services. With this legislation, the worker would also be entitled to receive an additional amount, based on the locality in which he or she resides, sufficient to cover the costs to obtain any fringe benefits not provided by the worker's employer.

This year learned of companies taking out life insurance policies on everyone from the CEO to the janitor, where the employer is the sole beneficiary. In the event of the employees death, the company cashes in the policy, tax free. I believe that life insurance policies should benefit the family of the deceased, not a speculating corporation. In September 2009 I introduced the [Employer-Owned Life Insurance Limitation Act](#) , H.R. 3669. This legislation will prohibit companies from taking out an employer-owned life insurance policy on any employee, except individuals earning \$1 million or more in salary, whose death would pose a significant financial risk to the company. For eligible employees, employers are required to provide timely notification of the policy, and the bill establishes penalties for companies that purchase policies on employees who make less than \$1 million in salary. H.R. 3669 will stop the practice of taking out policies without an employee's knowledge and maintaining them long after the employee has moved on to another company.

I have been proud to stand with workers throughout my tenure in Congress and am committed to ensuring they receive the protections they have earned.